Before Governors and Kings

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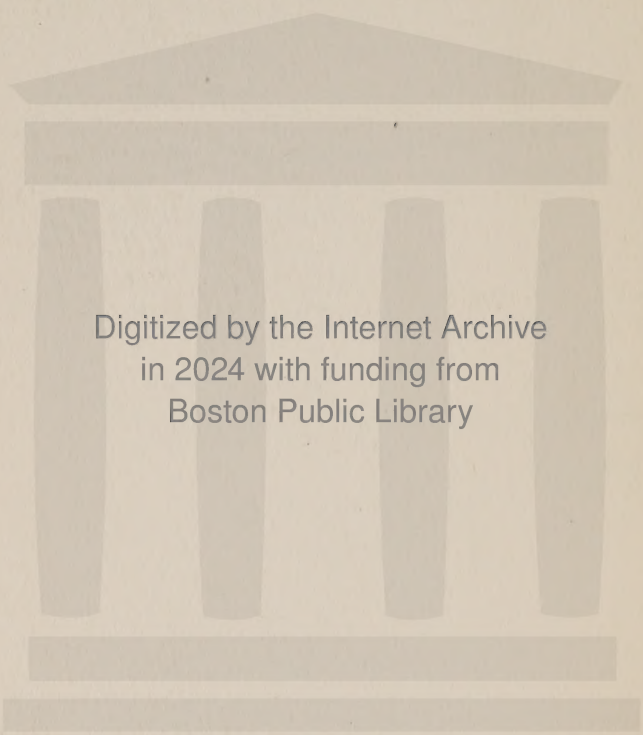
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Before Governors and Kings

by

CLARENCE D. USSHER

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PREFACE

Here is a parable out of Nature's great storehouse, given in an hour of need by the Spirit of God to Doctor Clarence D. Ussher, while living as a medical missionary in Van, Turkey, in fulfilment of our Lord's promise to grant wisdom to his servants in their hour of trial.

We would all do well to dwell oftener on our gracious Lord's admonition when as the disciples asked him to interpret the Sower and the Seed he exclaimed, "Know ye not this parable? How then shall ye know all parables?" This is one of those "all parables," abounding in the realm of nature, given that he may run that readeth the message to stir up and refresh other pilgrims on their heavenward journey.

HOWARD A. KELLY.

BEFORE GOVERNORS AND KINGS

SIR AHMED was a Circassian nobleman living in Constantinople in Abdul Hamid's time. He was a big fellow, over six feet in height, with a massive head; a man of dominating personality, quick-tempered, fearless, accustomed to having his own way. His education in Turkey had been above the ordinary and he had also spent some time in French universities.

Spies aroused the suspicion in Abdul Hamid's mind that Sir Ahmed was a "Young Turk"; that is, a member of the Turkish Revolutionary Party. He belonged to too prominent a family to be as summarily removed as many had been by the Sultan, but the wily monarch appointed him Mutessarif of Amasia, in the province of Sivas, and said to him with a warning look before sending him away:—

"Do as you please in Amasia, but do not come back to Constantinople or your life will be forfeit."

In Amasia the young man had a Circassian rival who had sent valuable horses and other presents to Abdul Hamid and had in return been permitted to rob and plunder as he pleased; whoever crossed him was disposed of either by the Sultan or himself. He had become so daring that at one time, I have been told, he carried off from the very gate of the city of Marsovan forty-two wagons loaded with merchandise on its way from Europe and America to merchants in the interior via Samsun, the Black Sea port. Valis and police had felt compelled to close their eyes to his depredations.

Sir Ahmed called his chief of police and ordered him to bring this robber chief before him.

"Oh, but can I? How can I?"

"You bring him, or your head will go."

With a low salaam the chief of police withdrew. Whether he gave the Circassian an invitation to a feast, or told him the Vali had some new honor for him from the Sultan, or wanted his advice about the government of the district, I do not know. Turkish diplomats use such methods. However it was managed, the Circassian came one evening to be the guest of the

Mutessarif. Sir Ahmed informed him that he would be hanged in the morning.

"Oh, no, I will not; I'll appeal to the Sultan; he is my friend."

"I am Governor here, and the Sultan has nothing to say about it." And the noted and powerful robber chief was hanged the next morning. The fear of that Governor fell upon all the district; robbers sought refuge in other provinces, and his fame spread far.

When Abdul Hamid was deposed, Sir Ahmed being in the inner councils of the Young Turk Party was appointed Vali of the province of Van. At this time the success of our schools and hospital was attracting attention. Our treaties with Turkey gave us the right to own property and real estate, to conduct and prosecute our legitimate business, and to have our premises and persons inviolable by Ottoman officials. When the Turk took Constantinople he found certain capitulations[1] in force and for his own advantage saw fit to perpetuate them. The capitulations renounced all rights over the person and property of the foreigner, who was to be amenable only to his own Government through his consuls. These

privileges, granted by the Sultan at first for his own benefit, were later demanded by the Franks as a right and Francis I had them included in a treaty with Suleiman the Magnificent in the sixteenth century. The French treaty of 1740 was made the basis for subsequent arrangements with other nations. America negotiated a treaty granting these privileges to Americans without reference to the capitulations, and also by the "favored nation" clause secured to American citizens all privileges which should hereafter be granted to any other most favored nation.

Sir Ahmed was so tyrannical that, harking back to Mohammedan law, which says that a foreigner may live in the country and do business unmolested for a year, but at the end of the year must either become a Mohammedan, quit the country, or become a slave and pay tribute, he dared to announce that he would have the American doctor deported and the hospital and schools closed.

Before deporting us he, as a conscientious Mohammedan, would give us a chance to accept his faith. It was Ramazan, when Mohammedans fast absolutely from sunrise to sunset throughout a lunar month. On the fifteenth day of this fast

many Mohammedans invite "infidels" to an evening feast for the purpose of converting them to Islam. To such a banquet the Vali invited the male missionaries of Van, Protestant and Catholic. Mr. Yarrow was confined to the house with a malarial attack and was unable to be present. Dr. Raynolds and I were the first to arrive, the other guests appearing after we were seated at the table, which was furnished "à la Frank;" it would have been a sin for a Moslem to delay his acceptance of Allah's bounty, so, although these others had been expected momently, we did not wait.

Sir Ahmed sat at the head of a long table, Dr. Raynolds was at his right, and next to him a Chaldean Catholic Bishop. The writer was at the Vali's left, and around the table were Catholic priests and Turkish officers.

After we had feasted on a delicious thirteen-course dinner, a sweet and a meat served alternately, each dish a separate course, the Vali opened the religious conversation by addressing the black-and-crimson-robed Bishop: —

"My Lord Bishop, will you kindly tell me what you think I must do to enter Paradise?"

"Your Excellency," replied the Bishop, "if

you will permit me, I believe that God, for Jesus Christ's sake, pardons my sins and will receive me into Paradise."

"No, sir," said Sir Ahmed; "I cannot accept that, for I believe God to be absolutely just and righteous and one who is absolutely just cannot show favoritism. I am Vali here and my power is practically absolute; you might have a friend in prison for debt to the Government [Turkish law imprisons a debtor until his debt be paid]; you might come to me and say, 'My friend is in prison for a debt which he can never pay, I beg you for my sake to pardon and release him.' I am a man; I might not want to hurt your feelings or deny you anything as my friend; I might pardon him; but if I did so I should be wronging the whole people. If God can do that kind of thing he is no more righteous than I am; I cannot believe that of him."

I thought Sir Ahmed's answer a good one and was interested to see how the Bishop would reply. But he said not a word more and I began to realize that this was one of the most critical moments of my life. Here was my religion on trial before Islam; the Vali had asked a perfectly fair question, the most important question any man could

ask,—practically "What must I do to be saved?" and it was up to Christianity to give him a satisfactory reply. If it could not it was not worth while as a religion. What could the Bishop have said?

I had got so far in my thought when Sir Ahmed, speaking loudly, as if to the far end of the table, but with his eyes turned slightly toward me, said, "Doctor Ussher, what do you say?" I did not know what to say, but I remembered the promise of Christ Himself, "Before governors and kings shall ye be brought for my sake . . . but when they deliver you up be not anxious how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak"; and I prayed with all my heart, "O God, give me an answer." Without a moment's hesitation I replied, and the answer came so distinctly as an answer to the prayer and was so far beyond what I alone was capable of saying that I feel it a duty to put it on record:—

"Your Excellency, if you will permit me I will use your own illustration; I will make a little change in it, I will call you the king; you have a son who is a friend of mine and loves me; I am in prison for a debt to the Government on which I

cannot pay one in a thousand. Your son comes to you and says, 'Father, my friend is in prison for debt; can you not pardon and release him?' You reply, 'My son, I too love him and do not want him to be in prison, but I cannot pardon him, for if I did I should be wronging the whole people. I must treat all alike.' 'Well, Father, will you let me pay his debt and he go free?' 'Yes, my son, if he will accept it I will not only let you pay the debt, but I will participate with you.'

"The son, without waiting to ask whether I accept or not, goes at once to the proper office, pays the debt, and it is marked on the books that my debt is paid. He receives a receipt upon which is the Government seal stating that my debt is paid, and now I am free. But I do not know it. Then he comes to the prison with the receipt and says, 'Rise, Brother, you are free, your debt is paid, I have paid it.'

"I may take one of three courses. I may draw myself up haughtily and say, 'No, I will not accept it, I will not be under obligation to any one!' forgetting that, being in debt, I am already under obligation and this would be but a shifting of the obligation. Should I do this I would un-

necessarily wound one who for love of me has already made a great sacrifice which cannot be taken back. It is on record that my debt *is,* not that it *will be,* paid; to refuse would be unworthy of me.

"But I might sit moping, with my head in my hands, and say, 'I wish it were so! But I cannot believe it.' 'But I tell you it is so; see, here is the receipt. Get out of the prison and test it,' he might say. 'No, I dare not, the police might find me and take me back to greater shame!'

"Should he force me from the prison, how would I behave? Not believing in my heart that I was free, I would look sharply this way and that in the street, lest a policeman might see me; should I escape to my house I would not dare to go near the door nor the window lest some one see my shadow and betray me to the police, and imprisonment in my house would be worse than imprisonment in the prison. Without faith, or belief, in the heart there is no liberty. This, too, would be ungrateful.

"The third thing I might do and ought to do, when he tells me he has paid my debt and I am free, is to fall at his feet and say, 'I thank you. I have nothing to give in return,'—since

my pennies to his pounds would be an insult,— 'but I shall endeavor by my life to show my thanks.'

"Then I would go out of prison, as they did on Liberty Day when Abdul Hamid was deposed and all the prisons were thrown open; every man was free; men who were sentenced to be hanged, those who were imprisoned for life, or were confined, hopeless, for debt, rushed into the street shouting, 'Azad! Azad!' (Free! Free!) It would be joy to me to tell every one that I was free and who set me free.

"But this is not all — instead of letting me return to my hovel where there is nothing but poverty he takes me to his beautiful home. There he gives me the Hamam [Turkish bath], the most thorough cleansing known. My prison clothes with all their filth are thrown into the fire, and that is the end of my past life. Then he brings me his own beautiful garments of colored broadcloth and silk, and, clothed as a prince, he brings me to you, O King, and says, 'Father, this is my brother!' And you say, 'Come, my son, from this day you are my son. You shall take my name upon you; I will entrust it to you and you will honor it. In my name

you shall go in and out; all that I have is yours; you shall share it with your elder brother.'

"This," I said, "is as I understand Christianity. God is the King. Jesus Christ, his Son, paid my debt and yours, too, yours just as much as mine. *I* believe it and know I am free; if *you* will believe it, it will mean as much to you as it does to me.

"Now," I said, "what will be my attitude toward the Prince? I see him coming down one of the narrow streets on horseback; some one has dumped a load of firewood in the street, filling it up; he cannot pass, what shall I do? Wait until he comes and say, 'What will you give me to remove this obstruction from your way?' Or will I not, as soon as I see him coming, set to work with all my might to remove the obstruction, and then, when he passes, step aside and salute him with joy, glad that I have been able to do something to show my gratitude for what he has done for me? If he should offer to pay me, I would say, 'No, I did not do it for pay. I rejoice that I can do something to show my appreciation of what you have already done for me.'"

"So!" said the Vali, knitting his brow; "and do you mean to tell me that the hospital and

schools you have here are to show your gratitude to God for something He has already done for you, and not for the purpose of winning some new favor from God?"

"Yes, sir, exactly."

"Well, I had not thought of it so before."

We all sat silent about the table until Sir Ahmed arose; then those on the right passed toward the reception-room door and waited there for the Vali to enter first; those on the left passed down the length of the table and around the end toward the rest. Just as I reached the farther end of the table Sir Ahmed, who was still standing at the head, threw up his hand, and all stood silent and motionless. Then, pointing his finger at me, with flashing eyes he sternly said, "But, Doctor Ussher, you say 'Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' God is one; He neither begets nor is begotten; how can you say the Son of God?"

The scene was dramatic. It was as if I stood before a court. I replied:—

"Your Excellency, I am talking to you in your language. If I were talking to you in my language, English, I should be able to say to you things which I cannot say in Turkish, because your language has neither the word nor the

thought. For instance, in a little while I shall say to you [and I said it in English], 'I am going home.' When I translate that into Turkish I have to say, 'Ava giderim' [I am going to the house], and then I must explain that when I say I am going to the house I do not mean that I am going to the building. I mean I am going where there is a companion, a family, love; where every member of the household thinks unselfishly for every other member — to the sweetest place on earth. By a long process I must explain to you that when I use your word I mean something different from what you have always understood by it.

"When God talks to man He uses man's language and is limited by it. He uses our words and then, perhaps by a long process, explains that He means something different from what we have been accustomed to understand from them. When God speaks of Jesus as his *Son,* He uses the best term that we have, but He does not mean simply a man born of a woman, as we have been accustomed to understand the word."

Here our conversation was interrupted, to be resumed when I went to pay my dinner call the following Friday morning. We were sitting

with a window between us and the sun was shining into the room. I put my hand into the ray of light and asked:—

"Your Excellency, what is this?"

"Why, that is the sun," he replied, in a tone of surprise.

"Is *this* the sun, or is that it which we see up there in the sky?"

"There is no difference; it is all the one light."

"Well, is that the sun that we see, or is there a body back of it that no man has seen at any time, but the light declares it?"

"Yes, I suppose there is a body that we know through the light."

"Is there one sun, or two? Which is the sun?"

"One sun, they are inseparable."

"Now," I said, "when I put my hand in the light I feel something; what is it?"

"It is the sun."

"Yes," said I; "it is a power that goes down into the blackness and death of the earth, takes hold of the life in the seed, and brings up the beautiful grass and flowers and trees. What is it?"

"It is the sun; without the sun there is no life."

"Your Excellency, is there one sun, or three suns?"

"One sun."

"Which is the sun, the light, the body, or the power?"

"It is all one and inseparable."

"Well, Your Excellency, if you have no difficulty in recognizing a trinity in the sun with three things so distinct as the light, the body, and the power, why should you have difficulty in recognizing a trinity in the Godhead? God loved man and wished to manifest Himself to him. The manifestation of Himself He calls his Son, just as your poets speak of the light as the son of the orb; and your Koran speaks of Jesus as 'Noor Allah' [Light of God] and 'Ruh Allah' [Spirit of God]. We Christians do not worship three gods as you accuse us of doing, but one God; God the Father, 'whom no man hath seen at any time'; God the Son, who said, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father'; and God the Spirit, the power or influence that comes from the Father and the Son into your heart and mine and teaches us what He wants us to be and do — all One Inseparable God."

There were no more threats of deportation,

and before a great while the Turks of Van made complaint to Constantinople that the Vali was too friendly to the Christians. He was removed from his position, but being a man of great power and ability he rose again and became Vali of the most important province in Turkey. When the order was given from Constantinople to deport and destroy the Armenians he refused absolutely to obey. He gave up a very large salary and allowed himself and his family to be banished and their lives endangered. The last I heard of him he was living on a farm in the interior of Turkey near Tokat where Henry Martin died. I have wondered sometimes how many of us who profess to be Christians would have measured up to the standard of that man who had never made any profession of faith in Christ. If we believe that Jesus The Christ *paid* our debt on Calvary, not that he is going to pay it on the judgment day or at some future time, does it not behoove us to ask ourselves, Are we showing our thanks by our lives? and How are we going to show our thanks?

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